

IS EAST CENTRAL INDIANA READY FOR A COMMUTER RAIL?

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ASHLEY SURPAS

DR. JOHN ROUSE - ADVISOR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

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Is East Central Indiana Ready for a Commuter Rail?

Introduction

Indianapolis is the capital of Indiana and has many employment and cultural opportunities to attract people to the area. Currently, the most popular way to get there is to drive there and then drive back home. A fairly new option is to get on a bus and head down there and then return home. The only problem with this option is that the hours of service do not always align with the hours of some businesses and offices in order to make this a viable option for those individuals needing to go to Indianapolis, but that do not plan to spend the night in Indianapolis in order to get these errands completed. Therefore, it is worthwhile to look at other options to see if there is something else that can be done to aid the citizens of Indianapolis and others around the state to make Indianapolis an easier destination to get to on a regular basis.

There has been a push in many urban areas for commuter rail transportation efforts in order to help citizens get from one destination to another more easily. There have been many arguments made for this type of transportation system especially now that there are more people thinking of “going green” and at a time when fuel prices are quite high. Talk of these types of systems tends to get more attention when the costs associated with traditional modes of travel become costly. Implementing a commuter rail system is a costly measure itself; therefore, it is important to see if it is a viable option of Indiana.

The plan for this paper is to first provide the literature about commuter rails and give an overview of two comparable commuter rails to East Central Indiana. Next, there will be a thorough discussion of East Central Indiana, which is referred to as the case

study. Following this will be an analysis section, where the ideas and points brought up in the literature review are applied to the case study. Finally, there will be a discussion of the conclusions from the analysis.

Literature Review

This paper, in particular, will examine two rail systems that were recently implemented in other states to see if a commuter rail would be a good fit for Indianapolis and East Central Indiana. The first is the Music City Star in Nashville, Tennessee and the second is the New Mexico Rail Runner Express in Albuquerque, New Mexico. These rail systems will be compared to the East Central Indiana area to see if any insights can be gained from the work that they have done to provide such a service for their citizens. In addition to the comparison of these two commuter rail systems, an overview of the different types of commuter rails will be analyzed.

These two commuter rails are comparable to East Central Indiana for different reasons. Tennessee's Music City Star is comparable because the population between the two areas are similar and the industries that each caters to are similar. The New Mexico Rail Runner Express is comparable because it is a longer distance track that is more comparable to the needs of the East Central Indiana area. They are both fairly new, which means that they have been built using some of the latest technology and architectural methods with the passengers in mind.

Types of Rail Transportation

There are three major types of rail transportation. Knowing and understanding the differences between these and the factors that is best for each one's utilization will

allow individuals to better understand the options available for the community. Not all are suitable for all situations so it is important to focus on the one that best suits the area's needs. If the options are not limited early on, there is little chance that the research done will offer a good picture of the options that are available within the area. Each of the three types of rail transportation that will be focused upon is different from one another.

The first is heavy rail and it is popular in larger cities because of the infrastructure that is required. The infrastructure requires an electric railway that is able to produce high speeds and rapid acceleration. It is a requirement that the train rails be separate from other types of transportation. Sometimes, the trains consist of one car and other times it has multi-cars. This type of rail requires sophisticated signaling and high platforms to accommodate the loading and unloading of people at designated stations. Because of the extensive infrastructure requirements, this type of system is best in places where there is a high volume of traffic. This type of transportation is sometimes known as a metro, subway, rapid transit, or rapid rail.¹

Another type of rail that can be used within East Central Indiana is light rail, which is sometimes called a streetcar, tramway, or trolley. It usually consists of a railcar or set of railcars (up to three) on fixed rails with minimal interruptions from other flows of traffic. It is usually powered by an overhead electric line and uses a trolley or pantograph. It also requires an on-board operator. It can have either high-platform

¹ American Public Transportation Association, "2010 Public Transportation Fact Book," American Public Transportation Association, http://apta.com/resources/statistics/Documents/FactBook/APTA_2010_Fact_Book.pdf.

loading docks or low-level boarding docks, but in the latter steps would be required to accommodate the flow of people using the boarding docks.²

The final type of rail is the commuter rail, which is sometimes called metro rail, regional rail, or suburban rail. This type of rail usually consists of either locomotive-hauled or self-propelled railroad passenger cars that operate on an electric or diesel propelled railway. There are usually one or two stations in the central business district that the rail serves. One characteristic of this type of rail is that intercity service is normally excluded unless contracted otherwise. With this type of system it is required that there be contracts with a transit operator to provide service. It is important that commuter rail service be provided on a regular basis because it consists of mostly local short distance travels between central city and adjacent suburbs. The routes normally provide service along current or former freight railroads. The cost of a trip can vary, but may consist of multi-trip tickets or station-to-station fares.³

There are additional types of mass transit that can be utilized in some locations, but East Central Indiana is not able to provide these types of services because it does not possess the infrastructure or geography. They are also more costly and require a lot more investment from the communities impacted by the service.

When comparing the three major types of rail transportation that are available, the differences between them become much more distinct and allow an individual to see which type or types may work best in a certain area. Heavy rail tends to cater to large urban areas that can sustain a large infrastructure and locations where there are a lot of

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

people willing and able to take advantage of the services. Light rail also involves infrastructure, but not to the same extent as the heavy rail. The most important distinction to make for this would be the requirement for an overhead electric line. Commuter rail is different from both heavy and light rail. Commuter rail utilizes already-existing infrastructure. Commuter rail is also capable of providing service to a larger area because it serves the city as well as the suburbs. Each type of transportation system serves a specific type of community. When looking at East Central Indiana, a commuter rail line is the best option to provide citizens with another transportation option.

Nashville, Tennessee and the Music City Star

The Music City Star has been operating since September 18, 2006 in Tennessee. It is a commuter rail that offers service between Lebanon and Nashville throughout the workweek at peak travel times. Lebanon is in Wilson County and Nashville is in Davidson County, which are adjacent to one another. They also have an additional run on Friday evenings for those individuals wanting to stay in the city to enjoy the evening. There are six stations between Lebanon and Nashville that riders can use to catch the Music City Star, which span the thirty-two miles that the Music City Star uses for the service. The trains are able to reach speeds of sixty miles per hour between stations.⁴

The riders of the commuter rail must purchase their tickets before boarding the train because no tickets are available for purchase on the train. Prior to boarding the train, there is a conductor on the loading platform that checks and validates the tickets for

⁴ Nashville Convention and Visitors Bureau, "Nashville – Statistics and Demographics," Nashville Convention and Visitors Bureau, http://www.visitmusiccity.com/media/presskit_statisticsdemographics.

the passengers. Once on the train, the passengers are expected to stand behind the safety lines within each rail car before the train departs the station. The train conductor will announce each exit so that everyone will know when to get off for his or her correct stop. The train cars and the loading platforms are accessible to those with wheelchairs and the hearing and/or vision impaired.⁵

Passengers are permitted to take a bicycle on the train and store it in the wheelchair space on the train car as long as those spaces are not being used. If a passenger brings a bicycle, then he or she must have the necessary straps to keep it in place. Overall, passengers are expected to conduct themselves in a respectful way for everyone else within the train car. People are expected to keep voices down and other noise-making devices to a minimum. People should not bring things onto the bus that can make it dirty and people are expected to maintain a safe environment on the train car for all passengers. When necessary, service animals are permitted to board the train.⁶

Nashville is a member of the Regional Transportation Authority, which was created in 1988 to improve air quality and economic growth for members. Each of the communities that join the group is allowed to have representation on the board, which is comprised of community leaders and elected officials from the localities. This group is important in getting the funding and support for the commuter rail line and for its future growth. This group is able to combine the efforts of each individual city or community and strengthen the relationships between them so that a greater purpose can be met for

⁵ Regional Transportation Authority, “Music City Star Commuter Rail,” Regional Transportation Authority, <http://www.rta-ride.org/>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

their constituents. An added benefit for commuters provided by the Regional Transportation Authority is that those commuters that are registered with the organization are eligible for a free emergency ride home when something prevents them from utilizing the commuter rail or other commuter transportation service. Each registered participant is allowed up to eight of these emergency rides home each year.⁷

The Donelson Station has a park and ride lot with about two hundred and thirty spaces for riders to park. The Hermitage Station has parking for about two hundred and eighty spaces for parking with additional space available at the park and ride lot near the Andrew Jackson Parkway. The Lebanon Station, which was once a factory that has been transformed into a boarding station, has nearly one hundred and forty parking spots in a park and ride lot. The Martha Station has parking for about seventy-five cars. The Mt. Juliet Station has about two hundred and twenty parking spots available for riders to use. This station is unique because the city where it is located is working to incorporate the station into the new town center that they are planning to build in the future. The new town center should attract new businesses and services to the area surrounding the station, which could create a greater demand for the commuter rail's service to the area and provide more opportunities and entertainment venues for those that take the commuter rail. The Riverfront Station does not offer any parking, but is used to help those using the commuter rail to connect to the proper bus to get them to their destination

⁷ *Ibid.*

within Nashville. Each of the stations that offer the park and ride feature also offer parking places for those individuals with disabilities.⁸

Once arriving in Nashville, it is often required that the rider find another way to get to his or her final destination. This goal is often met by using a local bus to make it to the final destination. Two buses provide complimentary bus service from the Riverfront Station to nearby areas that people using the commuter rail may need to get to. If they passenger must board a bus that is not the one of the complementary buses, then they must pay for the bus fare to their final destination.⁹

The cost to ride the Music City Star varies depending on the distance that is being travelled and how they are purchased. Single-trip tickets range in price from \$2.00 to \$5.00 when purchased at the loading platform, but if they are pre-purchased, they range in price from \$1.60 to \$5.00. It is also possible to pre-purchase tickets that are good for ten rides, which range in price from \$16.00 to \$45.00. Pre-purchased monthly passes range in price from \$64.00 to \$168.00. The ten-ride and monthly passes can be purchased online. Tickets can also be pre-purchased at other locations throughout the cities; these places include city halls and grocery stores.¹⁰

The schedule for the Music City Star starts at 5:45 A.M. until 6:35 P.M. with two to three trains in the morning to pick up passengers and two to three trains in the afternoon to return passengers. On Fridays, there is an additional train in the evening to allow people that work in the city the opportunity to see the attractions within the city and

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

socialize with friends and coworkers and still have a safe way home at the end of the evening. They also provide service for some special events in the area, when the situation permits. They typically do not operate on holidays.¹¹

In April 2010 the number of passengers riding the Music City Star increased forty three percent from the same month the year prior. There were eight hundred and forty one passengers in April 2010 whereas there were only five hundred and eighty eight during the April 2009. Earlier in 2010 there was another train car added to accommodate the increased numbers of riders.¹²

There are 150,824 people that work in Davidson County that live in another county.¹³ Likewise, there are 10,762 people that live outside of Wilson County, but live in another county.¹⁴ These individuals that commute to one of these counties but live elsewhere are able to utilize the commuter rail service if even only for a partial distance. They can commute to one of the stations and park their vehicle there and then commute on the train to their final destination. This makes it easy for those looking to commute to do so by limiting any obstacles that may be preventing them from using the services that the Music City Star offers them.

The costs for the Music City Star have been thought to be some of the lowest in the commuter rail industry. There was a need for the service within the state, but there was not a lot of money to pay for the infrastructure needs. The Regional Transportation

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ TN.gov, "Tennessee County Profiles," Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (TACIR), http://tennessee.gov/tacir/county_profiles.html.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Authority had to find ways to keep costs low. The stations that they have are not fancy; rather, they are basic, but are able to assist people in getting on and off the trains. They were able to purchase some of their equipment used so that saved a lot of money. Also, they are able to provide some parking for the passengers' vehicles. The hope with this type of basic rail system is that the voters will eventually vote to approve them more money for future expansion and growth that will allow the rail system to expand and meet the needs of the passengers.¹⁵

Albuquerque, New Mexico and the New Mexico Rail Runner Express

The Governor of New Mexico, Bill Richardson, made it a priority to improve the transportation options for commuters within his state. He was able to pass legislation in 2003 through the legislative bodies that appropriated the funds for the creation of a commuter rail, which began to provide service in 2008. Governor Richardson focused on the rail industry within the state because it has been used to grow the government in the past and was projected to do the same in the future.¹⁶

The implementation of the commuter rail in the Albuquerque area was a cooperative effort between many local entities. The New Mexico Department of Transportation and the Mid-Region Council of Governments were the two departments that were the most influential in developing and putting the commuter rail into service.

¹⁵ http://www.lightrailnow.org/news/n_nsh_2005-01.htm

¹⁶ New Mexico Rail Runner Express, "New Mexico Rail Runner Express Official Website" New Mexico Rail Runner, <http://www.nmrailrunner.com/>.

Local governments were involved in the entire process and now that the rail is operating these local governments are very involved in the daily operations of the commuter rail.¹⁷

There are also private entities that are involved in the future of the commuter rail. The private entities have three major roles in the commuter rail. The first is to sponsor stations, which will help save the government money by not having to keep the stations up to standards. Next, they are supposed to provide transit connections for riders. Finally, they are supposed to subsidize the commuter rail and other transportation passes. Doing this helps the riders out by not having to pay such high fees to ride the commuter rail.¹⁸

The New Mexico Rail Runner Express runs southwest from Santa Fe to Belen and passes through Albuquerque. The rail is broken up into six zones with a total of twelve stations open with two more opening sometime in the future. Most stations have an area for passengers to park their vehicles for free in a park and ride lot. Each station has a kiss and ride area where the passenger can be dropped off at the platform to board the train. Each of the stations has a simple platform design that the passengers can use to enter and exit the train car. There are shade canopies so that passengers can stay out of the hot Arizona sun and there are seating areas for passengers to utilize while waiting for their train car. The stations were created with the passengers in mind to make their commute as easy as possible and to promote their use.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Many of their stations are centered on other attractions within the community. For example, the Santa Fe Depot at the northernmost point on the rail has restaurants, retail stores, galleries and museums, as well as a farmer's market are all located within thirteen acres of open space that has a park, plaza, and promenade for those walking around the different places. Many of the stations also offer some type of connection to another transportation service, usually a bus service, to help the passenger make it to his or her final destination.²⁰

The cost to ride the train depends on the distance travelled and the type of ticket that is being purchased. There are one-way tickets, which are to travel from one station to another station. There are day passes, which allow the passenger unlimited rides for one day. There is a monthly pass available for purchase that allows the passenger unlimited rides for one month. Finally, there is an annual pass that allows the passenger to ride unlimited for one year. There are reduced fares for students, seniors, those that have a Medicare card, and those with disabilities. Children under ten years of age ride free all the time. Tickets can be purchased online or once the passenger is on the train. If purchased on the train, the tickets can be paid for with credit cards or cash. Tickets cost less if they are purchased in advance on the website.²¹

Full fare for one-way ticket can range in price from \$2.00 to \$8.00. A day pass can range from \$2.00 to \$9.00. A monthly pass can range from \$35.00 to \$110.00. An annual pass can range from \$350.00 to \$1,100. Reduced fare for a one-way ticket can

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

range from \$1.00 to \$4.00. A day pass can range from \$1.00 to \$7.00. A monthly pass can range from \$17.00 to \$55.00. An annual pass can range from \$170.00 to \$550.00.²²

The New Mexico Rail Runner Express runs seven days a week. The trains start at 4:02 A.M. through the week and run until 10:57 P.M. There is no service between 8:41 A.M. and 10:35 A.M. There is a lull in middle of the day where there is no service for approximately two hours. During the weekend, there is service from 8:50 A.M. until 8:52 P.M.²³

There are connecting buses for those people that are riding the commuter rail into a particular city along the rail line. In some cases, the connecting train that an individual uses once they are in the town does not require that the passenger pay for the bus transportation when a valid ticket from the commuter rail is shown to the driver so there is no added cost for these riders. There are some buses that are used specifically to transport people to the Albuquerque airport.²⁴ This allows the passenger to get to their destination with little issues connection-wise.

The New Mexico Rail Runner Express offers some amenities to their passengers. For those passengers that ride frequently, they are able to sign up to receive text alerts sent to their mobile phones that alerts them when there is a significant delay in the train schedule so that they can make alternate plans if necessary. Another service that they offer to riders is the ability to test Wi-Fi while on the train. This allows an individual to access the internet while on the train, which may help to improve their work. Another

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

amenity for the passengers is the opportunity to purchase a hotel package at a discount or a package that will allow them to have fun while in one of the cities served by the rail. Similarly, they offer the Rail Runner Discount Card that a passenger can purchase to save money at local restaurants, shopping centers, and other attractions within the vicinity of the commuter rail.²⁵

One option that is available to commuters that use the New Mexico Rail Runner Express is the ability to use the guaranteed ride home when necessary. This is much like Nashville's Music City Star's emergency ride home program. The user needs to register as a commuter. The individual is allowed five free rides home each year.²⁶ There is likely not as great of a need for this service with the New Mexico commuter rail because the service hours are more vast than those offered in Nashville, where there are large gaps in the day.

The commuter rail is also involved in the community by providing transportation service within the community if there is a special event that is taking place. Also, they hold coat drives and food drives that will help the communities that they serve by providing goods that are needed.²⁷

The commuter rail is also sensitive to the needs of the communities that it serves. In many cases, the rail line has decided to not use their horns in the town. These are

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ New Mexico Resources. "Guaranteed Ride Home." Community Resources Information, Inc.
<http://www.newmexicoresources.org/pages.cfm?contentID=69&pageID=10&subpages=yes&SecondLeveldynamicID=866&DynamicID=815> (accessed July 10, 2010).

²⁷ New Mexico Rail Runner Express.

known as quiet zones. The commuter rail has done this for a couple of reasons. The first is so that people driving a vehicle will not try to outrun the commuter rail train if they hear the horn, which keeps the passengers on the train safe as well as those in the vehicle. Another benefit that results from this change is that there is a reduction in noise for those that live along the rail line, which may help relations between the communities and the rail system stay positive.²⁸

Ridership for the New Mexico Rail Runner Express, during the first quarter of 2010, was down from the previous year by 65,864 one-way trips. They still managed to have 281,036 riders during the first quarter of 2010. One aspect that may skew the data is that in the comparable quarter in 2009, there were free rides offered to the citizens of Santa Fe to encourage them to ride the commuter rail.²⁹ It is hard to pinpoint the real reason that the riders that rode in 2009 did not in 2010 so they rail line will need to wait until July of 2010 to compare figures to the previous year because the free rides were no longer available in July of 2009.

The cost to run the commuter rail can be an issue for the people within the state because the cost to run the rail system is immense. The state and federal government subsidize much of the cost. The money that the federal government is currently giving the state, approximately \$4.5 million, is going to be lost and the money will need to be made up somehow. The fares that the riders are paying only cover approximately fourteen percent of the costs to run the commuter rail. Currently, the state pays seven

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ KRQE, "Ridership Falls Off on Rail Runner," KRQE News 13, <http://www.krqe.com/dpp/news/politics/ridership-drops-off-on-rail-runner>.

percent of the costs and the federal government pays for about eighteen percent. In 2008, there was a gross receipts tax approved by voters that provided enough money to pay for fifty four percent of the operating costs. Therefore, all of the taxpayers, not only the ones that utilize the services of the rail, pay the majority of the costs associated with the rail system. Unless changes are made that will allow the New Mexico Rail Runner Express to qualify for federal funds, it will be difficult for the state to continue to pay such a large portion of the costs once the federal funds end.³⁰

The Mid-Region Council of Governments of New Mexico have taken the criticism of the costs associated with the rail to heart and have tried to set the record straight by providing facts to the taxpayers within the state to let them know how their money has been spent on the commuter rail project. Even though the costs of supplies increased after the estimate was made, the project was able to stay on budget at a cost of \$325 million. The major unknown at the time was the cost that it would take to lease the track from Burlington Northern Santa Fe to use the track.³¹

Case Study

East Central Indiana is comprised of nine counties: Grant, Blackford, Jay, Madison, Delaware, Randolph, Henry, Rush, and Fayette. The main counties being examined in

³⁰ Holland, Kim, "Is the Rail Runner Running on Empty?" KRQE News 13, http://www.krqe.com/dpp/news/on_assignment/is-the-rail-runner-running-on-empty.

³¹ Mid-Region Council of Governments in New Mexico, "Myth Busting the NM Rail Runner Express," Mid-Region Council of Governments in New Mexico, <http://www.mrcog-nm.gov/more-news-showallnews-210/424-myth-busting-the-new-mexico-rail-runner-express-learn-the-facts>.

this paper are Delaware and Madison because of their proximity to Indianapolis and also because the majority of the population in East Central Indiana is located in these two counties or are able to get to these two counties to get on the commuter rail if it becomes operable. The other East Central Indiana communities are not forgotten; rather, they are going to be looked at when looking at how many individuals commute to another area, either Delaware or Madison County, which could be served by the proposed commuter rail. There is a great deal of commuting that takes place between the counties in East Central Indiana. Many times people from one East Central Indiana county are going to another East Central Indiana county to work while others have to go even farther. For those that must go south toward Indianapolis, having the commuter rail option may be worthwhile because it can save time and increase productivity.

The economy of East Central Indiana has heavily relied on the automotive industry, but, in the last decade, the automotive industry has scaled down and closed most of the factories in the area. Therefore, those within the area have had to look at other locations to find work. In many cases, people from East Central Indiana have gone south to Indianapolis to find work. The traditional commute can range from an hour to an hour and a half each way.

The two major cities in East Central Indiana are Muncie, located in Delaware County, and Anderson in Madison County. These two cities were home to many of the automotive plants that were once in the area and provided thousands of jobs to people in the area. Muncie is northeast of Anderson and both cities are northeast of Indianapolis. Therefore, the longest distance for the proposed rail is from Muncie to Indianapolis, which is between 60 and 65 miles.

In 2008, the number of people commuting out of Delaware County to either Madison or Marion County was 3,340. The number of people commuting into Delaware County from Madison County was 1,819. There were six hundred and ten commuters from Hamilton County into Delaware County and another three hundred and sixteen that commuted from Marion County. There are additional commuters into Delaware County from other counties within the Indianapolis Metropolitan area.³²

During the same year, Madison County had seven hundred and one commuters coming from Marion County and 1,582 from Hamilton County. Commuters from Madison also work in both of these locations. There are 5,005 people from Madison that commuted to Hamilton County and another 7,374 that commuted to Marion County. There are also additional commuters that travel into and out of Madison County from the other communities within the Indianapolis Metropolitan area.³³

There are also a large number of people from the other East Central Indiana communities that commute to Madison, Hamilton, or Marion Counties to go to work each day that could commute to the Muncie or Anderson station to ride the commuter rail train south to their final destination. These commuters could also be considered in the discussion to bring a commuter rail to the area.

There is a CSX line that runs from Muncie to Indianapolis and this would be the best way to connect the two cities to utilize a commuter rail line. This would involve communication between all of the counties between Muncie and Indianapolis, which are

³² STATS Indiana, “Annual Commuting Trends Profile,” STATS Indiana, <http://www.stats.indiana.edu/commframe.html>.

³³ *Ibid.*

Delaware, Madison, Hamilton, and Marion Counties. Once a plan was created and agreed upon by all communities, they would need to contract with the company that owns the CSX line and negotiate a lease to utilize the line between the two locations. Funding for the infrastructure and the lease will also need to be determined because the project cannot move forward if there is no way to pay for it. There must also be some cooperation between the communities to see which counties are going to be responsible for which details and who will pay for what as problems arise.

East Central Indiana is a member of an organization called Central Indiana Regional Transportation Authority, or CIRTa, which works to promote alternate transportation options to the area. The communities that want to be a part of the organization must apply to the organization and pay dues in order to have a say in planning and implementing the alternate transportation systems. The counties that are currently a part of the organization are Marion, Hamilton, Hancock, Shelby, Johnson, Morgan, Hendricks, Boone, Delaware, and Madison.³⁴ This means that Anderson, in Madison County, and Muncie, in Delaware County, have a say in the CIRTa decisions of the area. Being a part of an organization like this will allow the communities within East Central Indiana to have a fair chance at a commuter rail in the area.

It may be easier for there to be a commuter rail in the Indianapolis area because the public believes that there is a need for such service because the interstate system cannot carry the number of commuter driving into Indianapolis each morning and out of

³⁴ Central Indiana Regional Transportation Authority, “Connecting People and Places – Indiana Transportation Options,” Central Indiana Regional Transportation Authority, <http://www.cirta.us/>.

Indianapolis each evening. Of those surveyed, eighty seven percent believe that there needs to be additional transportation options in the area.³⁵ This information comes from a study that was conducted in 2008 of the Indianapolis-area's transportation needs. The study was conducted by Indy Connect and was paid for by The Greater Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce and the Metropolitan Indianapolis Board of REALTORS®. The study focused mostly on the Indianapolis Metropolitan area, or Marion County and the counties immediate surrounding it.³⁶ No attention was paid to the needs of Delaware County, but with discussion of Indianapolis's needs and Madison County being included in the study, there is a possibility that when the state considers funding or implementing any type of long-term commuter program that there will be some discussion of other communities that think they could benefit from a similar service.

The northeast corridor of Indianapolis is getting a lot of attention because there are such a large number of people that commute to Indianapolis from the area for work every day. The area has been congested for many years and there are many individuals that think the area needs some type of mass transportation alternative to offer the commuters and to relieve congestion on the roadways between the two places. The Indy Connect study suggests that a commuter rail train be implemented between Noblesville and downtown Indianapolis.³⁷ This is important because, if this portion is implemented, it may be possible to secure funding at some point in the future that will allow East

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Indy Connect, "A Central Indiana Public Transportation Initiative," The INDYCONNECT Initiative. <http://indyconnect.org/>.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Central Indiana to connect to this part of the rail and to make it possible to have a commuter rail from East Central Indiana to Indianapolis.

The survey found that over eighty two percent of voters in Madison County, where Anderson is located, think that there is a need for mass transportation.³⁸ This is important because there is some attention being paid to the area and that there is a need in the area for some type of transportation change.

Muncie and Anderson each have a bus system in place that those utilizing the commuter rail can use to get to their final destination. This will decrease the amount of necessary infrastructure to connect to the commuter rail and provide connecting service to other parts of the communities. This service will also ensure that there is an ability for those taking the commuter rail into the city to connect with the bus that will take them to their final destination.

Muncie is home to the Muncie Indiana Transit System, more commonly known as MITS. MITS provides bus service to most places within the city of Muncie, which the passengers commuting into Muncie can use to get to their final destination if they decide to utilize the commuter rail. The service that MITS provides has been awarded in the past for their excellent service to its riders. In 2005 and 2008, they were named Outstanding Public Transportation System by the American Public Transportation Association, which takes into all aspects involved in the organization. In 2007, MITS was awarded the Gold Award for Safety by the same organization.³⁹ All MITS buses are

³⁸ Central Indiana Regional Transportation Authority

³⁹ Muncie Indiana Transit System, "Welcome to MITS," Muncie Indiana Transit System, <http://www.mitsbus.org/default.asp?view=1&ID=236&SubID=69>.

fully accessible for those with disabilities and MITS offers another service called MITSPPlus that people with disabilities can utilize while in the city. Most of the equipment that MITS owns has been upgraded in the recent past and have recently purchased hybrid buses. MITS operates from early morning to late evening Monday through Friday and from early morning to early evening on Saturdays. They do not offer any service on Sundays or holidays.

Anderson is home to the City of Anderson Transportation System, better known as CATS, which is bus service within the community. All of their vehicles are accessible for those with disabilities. They offer service from early morning to early evening Monday through Friday and from early morning to mid-afternoon on Saturdays. They do not offer Sunday service or on holidays.⁴⁰

There is another transportation option for those that are not going into the City of Muncie or the City of Anderson. This service, called The New Interurban, is available to people within Delaware, Madison, Jay, Randolph, Henry, and Grant Counties, but the service that they provide cannot go to any of the same places that are served by either MITS or CATS. They can offer transportation to the outlying areas though. All of their vehicles are fully accessible for those with disabilities.⁴¹

IndyGo is the bus service provided to people within the Indianapolis area. All of their buses are currently accessible for those with disabilities. They offer their service to the community from early morning until late evening, though many of the routes have

⁴⁰ City of Anderson Transportation System, “City of Anderson Transportation System (CATS),” City of Anderson, <http://www.cityofanderson.com/CATS/>.

⁴¹ LifeStream, “Catch A Ride,” Lifestream, Inc, <http://www.lifestreaminc.org/index/ride.asp>.

alternate schedules. They have an online trip planner that riders can use to find which route they should use to get to his or her destination.⁴²

There is an organization that commuters can register with that gives them access to an emergency ride home if the passenger has an emergency throughout the day. The organization, Central Indiana Commuter Services, promotes carpooling, vanpooling, biking, walking, and the use of alternate forms of transportation or anything that will reduce air pollution and traffic congestion and provide a better life for those citizens within the Indianapolis area. Currently, this service is available to citizens in one East Central Indiana County, Madison County, but none of the others. This means that those that commute from Muncie are not eligible for the program.⁴³ The service could be expanded north to Delaware County if the commuter rail is implemented to help improve the number of people riding it to and from Muncie and other communities within the county.

Findings/Observations/Analysis

Results

Though the research on commuter rails is not extensive, especially about the two commuter rails discussed in this paper, there are some insights that can be gained from the information provided. The two commuter rail systems discussed are fairly new, which means that they have not been fully examined and the insights that can be gained

⁴² IndyGo, “IndyGo,” IndyGo. <http://www.indygo.net/>.

⁴³ Central Indiana Commuter Services, “Central Indiana Commuter Services,” Central Indiana Commuter Services, <http://www.327ride.net/>.

may be limited. On the other hand, they are new so the technologies that they have implemented may be able to be applied to East Central Indiana.

East Central Indiana has the need for mass transportation options and the statistics show that people are supportive of such measures. As the gas prices have increased in the past few years, there is a push for alternate forms of transportation that are more cost effective. Another push has been for more efficient use of fuels to help preserve the earth, which this would do by decreasing the amount of pollution that the automobiles emit while operating.

The best type of rail system for East Central Indiana is a commuter rail, a fact that has already been mentioned. It would require that there be at least one train car that can transport passengers between Muncie and Indianapolis. Since the area already has a CSX line that goes through the area, it would make sense to make this the route that the commuter rail would take. Though this type of rail is usually for a city and its immediate suburbs, there are occasions where there is service between the different communities within an area. This would be the case for East Central Indiana. This method fits the needs of East Central Indiana best because there is a need for less new infrastructure within the community, which would save money in the long run. If it were powered by electricity, there could be energy costs in the future that would cause the rates to be inflated, which would not serve the patrons or taxpayers well.

The costs associated with a commuter rail are large. It is a burden on taxpayers and the decision to implement one cannot be taken lightly. To implement a commuter rail takes a lot of time to plan out the best way to create the necessary infrastructure and to purchase the equipment. It is the job of the legislature and governing bodies to make

sure that the taxpayer money is spent in a reasonable fashion and that there is no waste. Also, they should try to get as much money from other businesses and other levels of the government to fund a portion of the creation and the operating costs associated with the commuter rail. The taxpayers should have a say in the best way to put the plan into action.

In order to get people on the commuter rail, there needs to be park and ride lots available for them to use. This can include building new ones, but the rail line may also be able to partner with neighboring businesses and/or churches to utilize their parking lots to hold any additional cars that may be brought to the area. This would also help to create a sense of community for those involved.

There have been thousands of people commuting on a daily basis, which is destroying the roadways between Muncie and Indianapolis and creating a burden on the taxpayers of the state. It is fiscally responsible for the city to investigate other methods of travel for these individuals that can save the taxpayers money in the long run. Just because there is a lot of money required to start the commuter rail does not mean that it will continue like that in the future.

With a great need for some type of transportation for the citizens of East Central Indiana, the legislature and government officials need to listen to the needs of these communities and see what the best step is for these communities. Currently, the interstate systems are congested and dangerous. The legislature's answer to the increasing demand for the interstate system in the past has been to expand the interstate system to allow more vehicles to use it, but that is not fixing the problem because the

system is still congested and costing taxpayers millions each year in repairs. Also, the congested interstates have created many dangerous situations for those on the roadways.

East Central Indiana has many of the pieces that New Mexico and Tennessee have implemented to make their commuter rails successful. This is important because that means that there are fewer things that the counties will need to decide who will provide these services. There is a lot that goes into making a commuter rail successful, but having a lot of the bigger pieces in place will make it easier. Also, by having so many of the services that are necessary for the commuter rail in place it shows that the state encourages commuter services.

One aspect of the rail systems that has not been discussed is the rail's ability or inability to promote economic growth within the region. It should be able to provide more jobs for the area because there will need to be people driving the trains and people willing and able to assist the passengers with their needs when they want to purchase tickets or to call or ask about the schedule and the services available.

Another aspect of economic growth is whether or not the commuter rail affects businesses and whether the commuter rail affects their decision-making for the future. Do they tend to locate close to the commuter rail so that employees will be able to utilize the services or do they locate farther away because they do not cater to the foot traffic that the train can bring? Depending on the business, it may be better to do one rather than another. Most businesses in the service industry would be better suited to be closer to the train because of the foot traffic that the commuter rail could generate for these businesses.

Similarities

One of the most important things that the three communities have in common is that there is a large influx of people moving from one area of the state to another in order to work. This is important in order to get a consensus on what the needs of the community are and what the best type of rail is for the community. There will also be issues on how the money to lease the railroad and purchase and build the necessary infrastructure and who will be the entity responsible for paying for it. Also, the way that the track, train cars, and other equipment will be cared for must all be discussed between the communities that will be taking part in the new commuter rail.

One thing that East Central Indiana has in place that both New Mexico and Tennessee have is the emergency ride home program. This is important for the passengers because many people are likely to be hesitant to ride the commuter rail because they are afraid that something will happen and they will be unable to get back home to do what is necessary. Having this program in place will allow them to feel more at ease with these concerns. Also, this will allow for people to take partial days off on a rare occasion when there is a doctor's appointment at home that must occur during business hours and do not warrant an entire day off of work. This will help the individual commute on days that they normally would have driven his or her own vehicle into work.

The major cities along the proposed route, Muncie, Anderson, and Indianapolis, each have a bus system in place, which is another feature that the other commuter rails had in place. This will allow the passengers getting off at these stations to catch a connecting bus to their final destination since another mode of travel is almost always required to get there. Another positive is that the funding for these bus systems has been

decided upon and has been in place for years. Granted, there are some issues for public funding throughout the entire state because of the property tax reform and the reduced revenue for the local communities. This could be further exacerbated if the commuter rail line becomes a reality because it will bring in additional people into these communities and there will be an increase in the demand for services. This issue would have to be addressed at some point in the planning process.

Each of the commuter rails that are already operating have created a regional transportation board of some type to represent the needs of the communities that are a part of the organization. The only way that this works is if everyone gets a say. This is the case for East Central Indiana, which has created CIRTa and has begun discussions regarding a commuter rail and other alternative transportation systems within the geographic area.

Suggestions

In order for the commuter rail to be viable for the long haul, the plans need to remember that taxpayer money is going to be funding a large part of the project and will be providing a lot of the money that will be required to operate it for the duration of the rail line. Therefore, the stations need to be built in a way that will be practical for the future and require little maintenance and upkeep throughout the years.

The cost to ride the commuter rail should be realistic. It should not be free for everyone all of the time and it should not cost a lot more to ride the commuter rail than to drive an individual's vehicle. Rather, there should be a happy medium. The New Mexico Rail Runner Express initially offers residents surrounding a new station a chance to ride the commuter rail free for a limited time. The hope is that this will allow people

the opportunity to ride the commuter rail and get acquainted with it so that they will ride it in the future on a constant basis or as a transportation mode for recreational use when they are going somewhere. It would also be beneficial to look into a program where there are reduced rates that the riders can take advantage of in order to save a little bit of money.

The length of the New Mexico Rail Runner Express is comparable to the length of the proposed commuter rail. The way that New Mexico has been incrementally opening stations is great because it allows some locations to have access to the service without having to wait for all of the stations to open up. They have also taken these new stops into account for the schedule and make slight adjustments according to the needs of the station. With a track that is as similar in length, which is something that East Central Indiana needs to keep in mind if they implement a system like it.

One aspect that the other commuter rails did that would be a great thing for the communities is to build the stations around community attractions when possible. This will improve the community by bringing in new people to the area and to encourage them to use the commuter rail to get to those destinations. It can also create an environment that will allow the community to embrace the new changes. It may also encourage them to try the commuter rail and to take it for a ride to go to Indianapolis or to another community along the rail community.

Along with placing the stations near community attractions, they can also tout the new stations as a tourist attraction in the area. There are many individuals around the country that enjoy trains and riding on them whenever they get the chance. By touting these stations and the rail, as a whole, as something that these individuals would like to

visit, the communities may be able to bring in new money to the area to help the local economy and the surrounding areas. Many times, families come on these trips together so they are likely to spend a great deal of time and money in the area.

Another way to market the commuter rail to people looking to vacation or to visit the area is to show them how inexpensive and entertaining the commuter rail is as a way to get around the area. It may be cheaper to ride the commuter rail while on vacation than to rent a car and fill it with gas while going from one place to another. They will also have a chance to look at the scenery of the area while on the train and they may not be able to have that opportunity while they are driving around the state.

It would also help to have the commuter rail stations around the other modes of transportation that they may need to use. Ideally, in Muncie and Anderson, there should be stations near the bus terminals so that the passengers can connect to their connections with little trouble. If they have to go out of their way to make a connection, then they may be less likely to utilize the commuter rail in the first place. It should be made as easy as possible for the passengers to get to where they need to go in order to continue their use of the commuter rail service.

The cost of connections to get to an individual's final destination should also be taken into account because these costs will increase the amount of money that they would have to pay when they ride. The New Mexico Rail Runner Express and the Music City Star both have trolleys that provide free service to the immediate area surrounding one or more of the stations, usually the most popular stations that see the most traffic. Sometimes, the riders are even offered a free ride on a connecting bus when they show a valid commuter rail ticket when boarding.

The amenities that the New Mexico Rail Runner Express offers are the services that cater to their patrons. The Wi-Fi that they offer for free is great for the passengers heading to work to catch up on a few things before starting their day. It also gives them something to relax after a long day at work. People enjoy these things and may choose the commuter rail just because of this option. If they have the option to use Wi-Fi, they may be more likely to ride the commuter rail even if they do not plan to use it.

New Mexico's commuter rail also gives the people that utilize their service the opportunity to purchase hotel packages at discount prices when they ride the commuter rail. This is beneficial especially for people visiting the area that need to stay in a hotel anyway and most of their meetings are near the commuter rail. They can work on the train on the way to their destination and save money at the hotel they choose to stay at.

The text message system that New Mexico implemented would be great for the passengers that ride the commuter rail on a constant basis and depend on it to get to work or an appointment. This will give them a chance to make alternate plans if and when possible. This also shows these riders that the people running the commuter rail care about their time and patronage. This may help the riders feel more comfortable supporting an organization that they feel cares about them.

Two programs that the New Mexico Rail Runner Express has in place to serve the communities are the coat drive and the subsidizing of costs by private companies. Both of these services improve relations between the passenger, the rail organization, and the communities that benefit from the service. These are also important to help keep the costs down, but also providing a high level of service.

The coat drive is a positive for the commuter rail and the community. The community benefits from the coats and the people that need the coats are able to receive them because of the passengers of the commuter rail. The commuter rail benefits because the community sees them as an asset to the community and may be more willing to utilize the services that they provide. They may not be frequent riders of the commuter rail, but perhaps an occasional rider, which may lead to them becoming a frequent rider. Also, those individuals that were helped by the service, they are more likely to repay the favor and use the services in the future.

Having private money involved can be a positive or a negative when discussing a public service. It can be negative because people could see these private companies as an influencing factor in the decision making for the service. Most people do not want to have a private organization involved in a public service because there is room for corruption within the public service. It can be a positive because it brings in new money to the public service that would likely have to come from taxpayers if the private company was not willing to support the public service. Therefore, the taxpayers would bear a smaller burden of the costs associated with the rail.

Conclusion

Many people from East Central Indiana are driving south to Indianapolis each day and there are alternate methods that they can make this trip. There are also people driving from the south north to Anderson and Muncie. One viable option for the long-term is to implement a commuter rail in the area. There are a lot number of people that are commuting to and from Indianapolis and other communities along the way and are

creating congestion on the interstates and creating dangerous driving conditions for the other people on the roads.

East Central Indiana has a lot of the infrastructure that is required to have a commuter rail. They have the trains that passengers can connect to and they have the CSX rail already going through the communities. Both of these points will help the area argue for the commuter rail to continue to their area. It will also limit the amount of money that the communities will have to invest because they already have a lot of the things that a commuter rail needs.

It would be beneficial for those planning the East Central Indiana commuter rail to look at the other commuter rails and looking at expanding the arguments presented in this paper. As these commuter rails last longer, they will implement new technologies and practices that could benefit East Central Indiana in the future.

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